

DARYL COOPER

BNCC ALTERNATE TRUSTEE-ELECT

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee,

The Bitterroot Valley is a place of beauty. It's blue, snow-capped mountains on the west, the rolling ocher hills to the east and the valley floor with its thousand shades of green all combine to make a place that people fall in love with. One woman said, 'you people don't realize what you have here. It's like living in a national park.'

Yes, the valley is beautiful to the eye, but what of the struggles of its people? Many people fall in love with the place and are inspired to move here to live. But many of those same immigrants move away after a few years because they cannot make a reasonable way of living here.

But what about the people who do stay? Many continue to struggle. What this valley needs is more prosperity. The northern end of the valley grows and grows, but where does most of that population work? In Missoula. There needs to be a boost to the economy of the valley as a whole. But what to do?

The proponents of the Bitterroot Valley Community College believe that part of the answer to that question is more education. But what are the choices a high school senior has upon graduation? Unfortunately, the choice for some is to do nothing. Others realize they must get further education and training if they want to get ahead in life, but a student here in the valley is then faced with another choice: live at home and endure high travel costs and much commuting time or, move to Missoula with its higher urban costs. A Bitterroot College can solve these problems.

But here's another problem which might not be so obvious: culture shock. The drop out rates in the first two years at a large university are high. <sup>WHY?</sup> One reason is that the culture shock of going straight from high school to a big university can be very intimidating.

We of the BVCC effort believe that a locally directed college can solve this problem too. A graduating high school senior will be able to further his or her education in a more familiar setting, one not so intimidating. He can, if he chooses, to live at home where living expenses, travel expenses, and the cost of tuition will be a more reasonable challenge to his finances. But you may ask what effect will this have on the Montana University system? We believe that a local Bitterroot College will help, not hurt the university system and the UM in particular and here is how: students transferring from the BVCC will already be used to the academic rigors of college life. They will have a much better idea of what will be expected of them at the university. The drop out rate will plummet because the incoming students will be better prepared academically and psychologically. They will already know what field they want to go into. They will be more focused and more determined to finish their education.

What about technical and work force training? We believe that a well prepared work force will help businesses already here and attract more business to come in. In turn, businesses will encourage more of our young people to get more training. It's a win-win TP situation. No matter what educational track a student chooses, preparation for university or joining the trained work force, the BVCC will be there for him. And, we believe, that many young people who would not otherwise go to college, will go if the BVCC is there.

We know that money is tight now. We know that it weighs heavily on your minds. This is why we are not asking for funding now. There are more ways to gather money for the college than just taxes. If the legislature will act now to bring this college into existence, we can <sup>GET STARTED</sup> start working on them. By the next time the legislature convenes in 2011, the country as a whole and the state of Montana will very likely be in better financial condition.

This college could be the crown jewel of the Bitterroot Valley, one that our local people can take pride in. And if they take pride in it, they will support it in whatever ways they are able. We have

faith in the people of the Bitterroot Valley. We are asking you to have faith in us. We are poised on the starting blocks. All we need is for the legislature to fire the gun.

— NOT STARTING WITH A BUILT CAMPUS.

— WE WILL INCORPORATE MODERN TECHNOLOGY, BUT FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION BETWEEN STUDENTS & INSTRUCTORS WILL NEVER BE OBSOLETE.